

Chinese Attitudes on Preventive War and the “Preemption Doctrine”

by Scott A. Silverstone*

July 2009

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This paper examines the attitudes on preventive war in the case of the Peoples Republic of China. Specifically it asks how Chinese elites – government officials and academics – view preventive war in the wake of American efforts to recast the preventive war norm and the invasion so Iraq. How do Chinese elites react to the logic and normative claims at the heart of the Bush administration’s —preemption doctrine”? Do Chinese elites reject it in normative terms reminiscent of the anti-preventive war attitudes prevalent in the United States during the decades after World War II? Or have Chinese elites accepted America’s position on this issue as a precedent that the Chinese government itself might mobilize politically in potential conflicts on its periphery?

With the release of President Bush’s first National Security Strategy (NSS) in September 2002, the administration articulated a bold claim about the use of military force that had been crystallizing in American strategic circles over the previous decade. According to a central element in the emerging —Bush Doctrine,” launching attacks against so-called rogue states suspected of pursuing weapons of mass destruction was a normatively legitimate and strategically necessary response to the changing threat environment. While the Bush administration used the language of —preemption” to characterize this policy option, the logic of using force under these circumstances was drawn directly from the concept of preventive war.

Preventive war has a long-standing history in the modern state system,¹ emerging from one of the most important dynamics of international politics – the power shift problem. While the distribution of power among states at any given time is a defining feature of the international system, it is never static. National economies and populations grow and decline at different rates, some states make breakthrough

* Travel funding for this project was provided by a research grant from the Institute for National Security Studies at the United States Air Force Academy. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or the United States Military Academy.

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<p>Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p>				
1. REPORT DATE JUL 2009	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Chinese Attitudes on Preventive War and the 'Preemption Doctrine'			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
			5b. GRANT NUMBER	
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
			5e. TASK NUMBER	
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Air Force Academy, Institute for National Security Studies, USAFA, CO, 80840			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	

advances in military technologies and effectiveness while others languish, the size of different states' armed forces rise and fall. The dilemma this dynamic creates is serious: how does a state protect itself when faced with the growing relative power of a potential rival? The preventive war option is based on the stark conclusion that it is better to strike this potential rival in the near term, in the early phases of a power shift, than to face a possible war in the future that would be fought at a much higher cost.

It is important to point out that according to this logic there is no certainty that a future war will actually be fought against the rising power. Nor is there any certainty that the rising power will actually use its new capabilities in an aggressive way. Unlike true ~~preemption~~, which is a tactical first move to blunt an actual impending attack by another state, preventive war is driven by worst-case assumptions about possible futures that remain blanketed in uncertainty. Yet given the inherent uncertainties of the international system and the future behavior of potential rivals, the state launching a preventive attack simply does not want to face the mere possibility of a more costly future war.²

But this defining feature of preventive war – one launched by a state out of fear of an inherently unknown future – presents its own serious problems. From a purely strategic perspective one must ask whether it is smart or foolish militarily to launch a war, to assume its costs on your own initiative, when there is no way to know that you were actually avoiding a worse war in the future. Even German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the consummate statesman of power politics, had difficulty calculating the immediate costs of war against alternative futures. –The idea of undertaking a war because it might be inevitable later on and might then have to be fought under less favorable conditions has always remained foreign to me,” Bismarck noted, —~~ad~~ I have always fought against it...For I cannot look into Providence’s cards in such a manner that I would know things beforehand.”³

From a normative perspective preventive war can be just as problematic. Is preventive war a legitimate act of self-defense, or is it an act of aggression by a state mainly interested in shaping the distribution of power in its favor? This is not an idle academic question; how it is answered can, and has, decisively shaped both the domestic and international politics of war. In the aftermath of World War I a prominent international norm emerged linking preventive war with international aggression, thus casting preventive war as normatively illegitimate strategic behavior. This norm had a potent restraining effect at the domestic level on American strategic decision making in the decades after World War II, as American leaders wrestled with their security options – including preventive war – in the face of the rising power of the USSR and Communist China. American leaders not only believed strongly that preventive war was in fact aggressive war, and thus unacceptable for the United States, they also worried that if America violated the ~~anti~~-preventive war norm,” other states would be much more likely to launch their own wars under the guise of preventive self-defense.⁴

In one of many examples, President Eisenhower firmly rejected the persistent requests of his top military advisors and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to launch preventive attacks against southern Chinese military facilities during the Formosa Straight crisis in early 1955. In his explanation to Dulles, Eisenhower proclaimed, “It is oftentimes necessary to take heavy liabilities from a purely military standpoint in order to avoid being in the position of being an aggressor and the initiator of war. This is a price which often has to be paid and which may have to be paid in this case.”⁵ In turn, America’s respect for the anti-preventive war norm over many decades helped sustain a broader international belief that preventive war was indeed aggression, and thus normatively unacceptable. In a fascinating echo of Eisenhower, Chinese leader Mao Zedong, who held firm beliefs about the inevitability of violent conflict in political life and the value of offensive military action, also resisted the preventive war option because of the international political backlash it would provoke. For Mao, “to strike the enemy...first, without specific provocation would be to give it the sympathy of world opinion and would tar the [initiator] with the politically damaging label of *aggressor*.”⁶

Seen in this important historic context, the Bush administration’s formally articulated position on preventive war in the 2002 NSS was not merely a simple adaptation to a changing threat environment in the 21st century. It was a direct challenge to, and in fact a conscious effort to alter, a key normative claim from the previous century about the conditions that justify the use of military force. This paper examines a critical question that flows from this challenge: what impact have America’s persistent efforts to open normative acceptability for preventive war, its subsequent application of this strategic option against Iraq, and open discussion of preventive attacks on Iran, had at the international level? In recent years some scholars and political leaders have worried that the changing strategic culture in the United States, its articulation in the Bush administration’s “preemption doctrine”, and America’s consequent actions, would create a more permissive normative environment for other states to follow suit. The question remains, has America’s example had this effect?

Despite the importance of this question there has been virtually no empirical research on whether a more permissive attitude on preventive war is actually appearing among other countries, or conversely, whether America’s actions have strengthened the international commitment against preventive war. Answers to this question have direct policy relevance on two fronts. First, if there is indeed evidence that the normative acceptability of preventive war is increasing at the international level, or even within specific states, policymakers will be better able to anticipate the likelihood that other states will themselves turn to preventive war against rivals. Greater acceptability at the international level would also make it more difficult for American leaders to mobilize international political opposition to the use of force in cases it objected to. While the 2002 NSS was clearly meant to open up preventive war normatively as an option for the United States, it also pointedly asserted that America would not accept

other nations’ —us [of] preemption as a pretext for aggression.”⁷ Whether America accepts it or not, the U.S. preventive war precedent, and its championing of the concept of preventive self-defense, might indeed be used by other states as cover for acts of aggressive military force. Conversely, on a second front, if there has been a strengthening of the anti-preventive war norm at the international level or within specific states, as an adverse reaction to American behavior, policymakers will be better able to anticipate international political opposition to the future use of preventive force by the United States itself.

Building on this question, this paper examines attitudes on preventive war in the case of the Peoples Republic of China. Specifically it asks how Chinese elites – government officials and academics – view preventive war in the wake of American efforts to recast the preventive war norm and the invasion of Iraq. How do Chinese elites react to the logic and normative claims at the heart of the Bush administration’s —preemption doctrine”? Do Chinese elites reject it in normative terms reminiscent of the anti-preventive war attitudes prevalent in the United States during the decades after World War II? Or have Chinese elites accepted America’s position on this issue as a precedent that the Chinese government itself might mobilize politically in potential conflicts on its periphery?

To frame this study and organize its findings, the paper draws from the literature on international norms and strategic culture. A burst of innovative scholarship in the past several decades has explored the role of culture, behavioral norms, ideas and identity in state behavior. The essential claim is that states are not uniformly rational entities collecting and evaluating objective information about the world, that make strategic decisions after rationally calculating the material costs and benefits of a range of alternative policy options. Instead, *beliefs* about —national security, the military as an institution, and the use of force in international relations,” often shape where state leaders identify threats and how they evaluate the legitimacy and effectiveness of various policy options in response.⁸ Following this basic claim, if preventive war is tightly linked to the broader concepts of self-defense and aggression, and if state actions are actually shaped by the heavy normative implications of these ideas, the literature on international norms and strategic culture is an indispensable guide. This is particularly appropriate for studying the case of China, given the strong claims that scholars of Chinese international and military affairs have made about the importance of deep cultural traditions that influence China’s contemporary behavior.

To investigate Chinese attitudes on preventive war, the author conducted an extensive set of interviews and focus group discussions during a visit to Central South University (CSU) in the city of Changsha, China in November 2008. CSU is among the largest universities in China, with distinguished programs in political science and international law. Over the course of the visit, interviews were conducted with 120 graduate students and 18 faculty members in the politics and international law programs, including the director of the international studies department and the dean of the law school. In

addition, an extended interview was conducted with the Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the National University of Defense Technology in Changsha, who is a general officer in the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), and several of the faculty members in his program. Clearly this is a small sample of Chinese military and academic opinion. The data in this paper cannot be treated as representative of the official Chinese government position on the preventive war question or definitively represented of those Chinese academics with most influence on government policy.⁹ Nevertheless, the data do offer valuable insight into the attitudes held by some of the keenest local observers of Chinese foreign and defense policy and U.S. foreign policy. To supplement this interview data, evidence is also presented from a review of national-level Chinese media reports on President Bush's "preemption" doctrine.

To properly frame this inquiry the paper will first discuss several key theoretical issues central to the research question. The next section examines the power shift problem in international relations as the source of the preventive war temptation and highlights how most studies of preventive war focus on the role of material variables as the key to determining whether states will actually exercise this strategic option. The paper then challenges this material approach by introducing the claim that beliefs about the normative legitimacy of preventive war, beliefs evident at the international level and within the distinctive strategic culture of the United States, shaped strategic decision making in decisive ways for much of the 20th century. It briefly traces both the emergence of an anti-preventive war norm after World War I that linked preventive war with international aggression, and the development in the early 1990s of new, more permissive beliefs in the United States that preventive war could be considered an act of legitimate self-defense. This sets the stage for examining how Chinese government officials and academics have reacted to the American challenge to the anti-preventive war norm, particularly to the Bush administration's formal efforts to recast preventive war as a legitimate strategic option and its activation in Iraq in 2003.

As discussed in detail below, the findings from both interviews and the Chinese media demonstrate that Chinese elites overwhelmingly reject American claims on behalf of a new preemption doctrine. There is no evidence that Chinese elites are inclined to accept either the normative language or the strategic rationale for a preemption/preventive war policy to deal with China's own security challenges. In fact, the dominant reaction was to see the preemption doctrine as a form of aggressive warfare, as a tool for entrenching American hegemony in the international system, and as a direct threat to the international norm the Chinese most strongly defend – the sovereign right to non-interference.

The Power Shift Problem and the Preventive War Temptation

The preventive motive for war emerges directly from the basic background conditions of world politics so clearly laid out by realist scholars of international relations. It has become a truism in the field

that individual states in the international system exist in a condition of anarchy, which simply means there is no higher authority among or above the states to provide security. At a minimum, anarchy creates a permissive environment in which states can use military force against one another for any number of reasons, ranging from achieving physical security, accumulating material wealth, and promoting an ideology or religion, to aggrandizing the stature of state leaders or a ruling party. Realists argue that the implications of anarchy are simple: if a state wants to survive and prosper, and all states are assumed to share these basic goals, it must have sufficient power to physically safeguard its interests against other states.¹⁰ In the realist canon, therefore, we find that power, most commonly defined in material terms (economic output, military strength, population, natural resources¹¹), is the defining feature of world politics.

In the extreme, power determines whether states survive, how well they can defend their territory and population from predation, whether they can secure access to critical resources and trading partners essential for economic well-being, and whether they can set their own policies free from the coercive influence of other states. Power determines the hierarchy of states in the international system, thereby determining which states set the rules for international interaction. Power decides the outcome of the inevitable conflicts of interest that arise among states.¹²

While a given state's power may be a function of the material resources it can mobilize, power can only be measured relative to the resources other states can deploy. According to this view, state leaders must remain fixated on how strong their state is compared to others. Most important for the preventive motive for war, the relative distribution of power among a given set of states is rarely static. As Robert Gilpin notes, states will experience different rates of growth (or decline) in the economic, military and technological bases of power.¹³ Even during periods in which all major states are experiencing growth in the material bases of power, some states may simply grow faster than others, setting up an inevitable shift in the relative distribution of power as some states threaten to narrow the power gap or even exceed the power of others.

These shifts in relative power can have profound implications for state behavior. What is at stake if a power shift occurs is “future influence over a range of diverse and partly unpredictable issues.”¹⁴ The rising state, to the degree that it is dissatisfied with the international status quo, “will seek to alter the system in ways that favor [its] interests.” It may seek to do so by “bending[ing] the rules governing the international system, the division of the spheres of influence, and...the international distribution of territory.”¹⁵ The dominant state must anticipate that as a potential adversary’s power rises, so will its “appetites.”¹⁶ In other words, the dominant state must confront the possibility of direct challenges to a status quo it wants to preserve, or more specifically, a direct challenge to its own core interests.

The great strategic dilemma in this situation is to determine exactly how to respond to this threatened or ongoing power shift. As prominent realist scholars have acknowledged, the material base of realist theory does not determine a single solution for what should actually be done in response to a power shift.¹⁷ In fact, realist theory may provide the basis for a range of policy options that includes building a better *defense* against a direct military attack,¹⁸ *deterrence* of the emerging power through the threat of retaliation against aggressive actions,¹⁹ or making concessions to, thereby *appeasing*, the rising state so it does not see the need to use force as a way to satisfy its goals.²⁰

The final option in response to a feared or ongoing power shift is *preventive action*. The most extreme form is preventive attack, when force is used to destroy or seriously degrade specific rising capabilities before they are fully formed. Unlike a balancing response meant simply to deter or defend against the actual use of such rising capabilities, preventive action is a refusal to accept this growth in the first place, an effort to arrest the kinds of power shifts that introduce greater uncertainty and fear among states. Gilpin actually calls preventive war the “most attractive response” for a leader facing this strategic question because it “eliminate[s] the source of the problem.”²¹ Michael Howard goes so far as to connect most wars in the modern state system to the preventive motive that emerges from the struggle for power in anarchy.²²

Despite the historic frequency and apparent logic of the preventive motive for war, Vagts observes that “proposed wars of prevention have largely remained unfought wars, far more often advocated...than actually undertaken.”²³ This supports Levy’s contention that the preventive motive that accompanies a feared or ongoing power shift is not enough to actually spark war.²⁴ Other variables are at work to determine if a state actually selects preventive war from among the range of options available to address the strategic problem. The key question then is what might keep proposed preventive wars from actually being fought?

The dominant response to this question emphasizes the material factors central to the realist worldview. Like many scholars, Levy argues that a first approximation of the strength of the preventive motive for war can be determined by a rational cost-benefit framework based on expected-utility calculations, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of war now with those of delay.²⁵ In other words, from the material perspective state leaders should ask a series of questions before launching a preventive war. What costs can this potential adversary impose on me today in the event of war? What costs can it impose at some future date if the projected trend in the relative power shift continues? How much of an advantage do I derive from engaging in armed conflict earlier rather than later? Do I have the military forces available to actually execute a successful preventive attack? What is the likelihood of halting the power shift with a preventive attack? What is the likely magnitude of retaliation or the risk of conflict escalation on an unacceptable scale? Can I achieve my security goals and avoid the risks of a

power shift at a lower cost through other strategies, like preparation for defense, deterrence, appeasement, sanctions, or negotiated adjustment?

It seems intuitively obvious that before launching preventive war state leaders would indeed go through the kind of analysis reflected in the questions posed above. But a critical question remains: does this material calculus exhaust the possible variables that might shape whether a state actually launches a preventive war? In other words, does the cold calculus reflected in these strategic questions fully reflect how state leaders think about the preventive war option? In recent decades a growing number of scholars have challenged the view that material variables and calculations of utility fully drive decision making. As an alternative, or supplement, to material factors scholars are highlighting the impact of beliefs and ideas about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of different forms of behavior on how states respond to the problems they face. These beliefs may be shared among multiple states at the international level or emerge from the strategic cultures of specific states. In the case of the preventive war temptation, while the material reality of shifting power in the international system creates the strategic problem in the first place, *how* a given state responds to that power shift can be shaped in decisive ways by beliefs about whether preventive war is a legitimate form of self-defense or if it represents an act of international aggression. Before examining the normative aspects of preventive war, it is useful to discuss in more detail the literature on ideas, culture, and norms in world politics.

The Impact of Norms and Culture on Strategic Decision Making

In contrast to material arguments about state behavior, the ideational approach emphasizes *ideas* or *beliefs* about certain types of behavior.²⁶ The basic claim from this perspective is that political leaders will not make choices based on material factors alone; they may also be influenced by collectively held beliefs about what forms of behavior are either acceptable or unacceptable in a specific type of situation. Norms are commonly defined as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity,”²⁷ or more simply, a norm should establish a “standard of right or wrong” that presents “prescriptions or proscriptions for behavior.”²⁸ In the context of any given strategic problem, these beliefs about the various options available do not dictate state behavior. Norms may, however, in Nina Tannenwald’s words, “shape realms of possibility. They influence (increase or decrease) the probability of occurrence of certain courses of action.”²⁹ In this way norms are said to regulate state behavior through what March and Olsen call the “logic of appropriateness.” As state leaders wrestle with a strategic problem, March and Olsen argue that they are not simply focused on the consequences of various actions from a utilitarian perspective, but must consider how appropriate different actions may be for that type of situation. This in turn will impact their willingness to accept or reject particular courses of

action.³⁰ In effect, this shifts the policy question from —is this a smart thing to do militarily?” to —is this the right thing for this country to do?”

Collective beliefs about standards of behavior may be widely shared by numerous states in the international system. A large body of research on international norms focuses on this level, exploring what are called —inter-subjective” understandings of how states should or should not act in particular situations. At the most basic level, the sovereignty principle that creates the political structure of the international system itself depends on broad respect for a norm prohibiting intervention in other states’ domestic affairs. Without this norm, the very concept of a system composed of autonomous political entities has little practical meaning. While military force may be retained as the ultimate guarantee that a state’s sovereignty will be protected, the idea of sovereign rights to non-interference has a powerful restraining effect on states even in the absence of physical restraints.³¹ In more specific cases, scholars have explored such shared international norms as those prohibiting genocide,³² the use of chemical and nuclear weapons,³³ and trafficking in slaves and endangered species,³⁴ and norms that promote such state obligations in war as humane treatment and protections for enemy prisoners and non-combatants.³⁵ The question over whether torture is a legitimate means to extract intelligence from captured —enemy combatants” in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars created a firestorm of controversy in the United States. Many argued, and the U.S. Senate endorsed the view, that even if torture proved to be an effective method for generating important information for the global war on terrorism and the war against the Iraqi insurgency, it violates both an international norm prohibiting torture and runs contrary to an American identity that finds torture barbaric and unacceptable for its own behavior.³⁶

Collective beliefs about proper behavior may be confined to a particular state. At this level, our focus would be on a collective sense of identity and character shared within a domestic society, and how this sense of identity will shape beliefs about what behaviors are consistent or inconsistent with that identity.³⁷ The great American statesman George Kennan argues that any state must be guided by certain principles in its foreign policy. These principles define what the state should and should not do, —the rules and restraints a country adopts.” He argues they emerge within a state from —a predominant collective sense of itself – what sort of country it conceives itself or would like itself to be.” Most important, collective identity helps define —what sort of behavior would fit that concept.”³⁸

Among international relations theorists as well as students of comparative politics and defense policy, —strategic culture” is an active area of research on the role of ideas and domestic identity in decision making.³⁹ Thomas Berger argues that within a particular state, a political-military culture —influences how members of a given society view national security, the military as an institution, and the use of force in international relations.”⁴⁰ Using this concept he links the abject failure of militarism for Germany and Japan and how prominent domestic political figures have interpreted the painful history of

defeat in World War II with the post-war reluctance of each state to accept the use of military force in its foreign policy, despite the material incentives from the international system to adopt a more robust military capability and willingness to employ it. In her work on the —nuclear taboo,” Tannenwald shows how American leaders‘ decision to reject the use of nuclear weapons in the Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars was profoundly affected by a belief about the character of America as a —civilized” state that made the use of nuclear weapons after 1945 morally repulsive. This self-identity produced a widespread (though not universal) sense that —we just don‘t do things like this,” even though in material terms the use of nuclear weapons may have made sense in these conflicts.⁴¹ As we will see below, a robust literature points to strategic culture as an important variable shaping China‘s security policy. If these scholars are correct, then the culture variable may provide valuable insight into how Chinese elites view preventive war. Before turning to the alternative characterizations of China‘s strategic culture it is important first to examine the normative dimensions of preventive war specifically in more detail.

The Anti-Preventive War Norm

As noted earlier, most scholars have treated the preventive war option from a purely material-strategic perspective. The actual history of this concept in American policy making and at the international level, however, shows that in the last century preventive war was not treated as a purely military problem. Preventive war, like using military force under almost any circumstances, carries *normative* meaning that can shape the domestic and international politics of security policy in decisive ways. This is derived from the fact that prevention as a motive for using military force is intimately linked with the normatively-laden concepts of aggression and self-defense. Because preventive war by definition only makes sense when described as a way to avoid future harm at the hands of a growing potential adversary, some have cast it as —anticipatory self-defense.” Yet because this option is launched to prevent a shift in the balance of power, and not to stop an actual impending attack, it can also be seen as an act of unprovoked aggression.⁴²

For much of the 20th century, the belief that preventive war is aggression was dominant, both as a central claim in America‘s strategic culture and as an international norm. Before the 20th century, in both international law and diplomatic practice, the resort to war was typically treated as the inherent sovereign right of any state. While Saint Thomas Aquinas had defined conditions for —just” and —unjust” wars many centuries earlier, most statesmen before World War I spent little time worrying about setting limits on what justified the use of force. Carl von Clausewitz‘s famous dictum from the early 19th century, that —war is a mere continuation of policy by other means,”⁴³ not only reminded strategists that war was simply one tool among many to meet policy goals. It also captured the spirit of the age, in which war was considered a perfectly acceptable tool as national leaders faced their responsibilities to serve the state‘s

interests. Only the sovereign state itself was in a position to judge if war was an appropriate means to pursue a specific set of policy goals under a specific set of circumstances.⁴⁴

World War I, and the horrible toll it exacted in blood, economic ruin, and political upheaval, was a profound external shock to beliefs about war so blithely accepted for generations. Over nine million soldiers and five million civilians were dead. 21 million soldiers suffered combat wounds. Four empires were destroyed. The victors suffered economic disaster along with the vanquished. Given the unprecedented and unexpected magnitude of these costs, it is unsurprising that a dramatic shift in attitudes about war would sweep Europe and the United States.⁴⁵ War was no longer accepted as a ~~—mere~~ continuation of policy by other means,” as Clausewitz had counseled. The lesson most drew from this war, a lesson which settled deeply in the popular mind and which was reflected in diplomatic initiatives, was that war itself had become too dangerous to tolerate as a normal tool of statecraft.

The first clear indication of a formal shift in attitudes was the war guilt clause in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which rested on the claim that Germany had no legitimate right to launch war in 1914 as a measure of preventive self-defense against the growing power of Russia and the fear of a more costly future conflict. By branding Germany as the ~~—aggressor,~~” the treaty reflected what the Commission on Responsibilities called the moral condemnation of Germany’s initiation of aggressive war by the —public conscience.”⁴⁶ This specific decision set an enduring precedent for the subsequent criminalization of —war~~s~~ of aggression,” a precedent that infused the diplomacy of the inter-war years. In Europe, the link between aggression and criminality was reinforced by two key agreements within the League of Nations, the 1924 Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, and a 1927 League Assembly resolution. Similar initiatives in the western hemisphere followed the example set in Europe.⁴⁷

Viewed in retrospect, the burst of enthusiasm for renouncing war in the 1920s and early 1930s was widely condemned as ~~—utopianism,~~” a naïve and dangerous blindness to the realities of world politics that seemed to dictate the inevitability of power struggles and armed conflict. After all, critics noted correctly, the earnest popular quest for great power peace, and the subsequent multilateral agreements condemning war as criminal behavior, did nothing to stop Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan from unleashing the violent fury of war once again.⁴⁸ Many concluded that this apparently desperate desire for peace actually encouraged the aggressors of World War II.⁴⁹ In the United States, the realist school of international relations was ascendant, and statesmen were advised to move beyond earlier dreams of renouncing war. In this intellectual climate, one might expect that the arguments casting preventive war as legitimate self-defense would provide enough normative cover to ease whatever moral qualms this policy might stir up within the American political system. If the prohibition on aggressive war from the inter-war period was still taken seriously, then a radically expanded definition of self-defense might be the solution.

Despite the shattered hopes of the inter-war period, World War II did not lead American leaders and its citizens to fall back on fatalistic pre-World War I concepts of war as not only a necessary, but a normatively unproblematic, tool of statecraft, a “mere” continuation of policy by other means. Even though those “scraps of paper” like the Kellogg-Briand treaty did not restrain the militarism of the 1930s and early 1940s, the consequences of German and Japanese aggression actually reinforced and magnified the lessons first learned through World War I. While the inherent right to use military force in self-defense remained sacrosanct, war once again proved to be an institution that brought immense misery.

One of the most influential American leaders in this period, former Secretary of War and Secretary of State Henry Stimson, articulated how the external shock of two world wars had affected both beliefs and action by mid-century. Stimson’s public service at the highest levels of government spanned a thirty-four year period that bracketed the outbreak of the First World War in Europe and the Allied victory in the Second World War. This particular time period was crucial for shaping Stimson’s attitudes on war and makes him a useful proxy for understanding why the anti-preventive war position was dominant in the early Cold War. As Stimson described it in a 1947 *Foreign Affairs* article, World War I alone forged the belief that “the man who makes aggressive war at all makes war against mankind. That is an exact, not a rhetorical description of the crime of aggressive war.” By the time Hitler initiated his own wars of aggression, Stimson insists the “moral judgment” against this crime dated “back a generation... Aggression is an offense, and we all know it; we have known it for a generation. It is an offense so deep and heinous that we cannot endure its repetition.”⁵⁰ While Stimson’s argument here was in defense of holding political and military leaders of the Nazi regime accountable at Nuremberg, some months later he used the same moral position on aggression to pass judgment on the idea of an American-initiated preventive war against the emerging Soviet threat. Not only was preventive war wrong when judged against absolute moral standards, it was particularly repulsive for America. “I cannot believe,” Stimson asserted, “that this view [in support of preventive war] is widely held. For it is worse than nonsense; it results from a...cynical incomprehension of what the people of the world will tolerate from *any* nation. Worst of all, this theory indicates a totally wrong assessment of the basic attitudes and motives of the American people.”⁵¹

Another prominent voice, John Foster Dulles, who would become Eisenhower’s Secretary of State in 1953, shared Stimson’s view that the tragically repetitive history of the early twentieth century had forged normative shifts in attitudes toward war and its initiation. According to Dulles, “we belong to a generation that has already subjected countless human beings to incredible horror,” the result of which is an emotional response—a “fear of war as never before.” From this emotional reaction comes a normative commitment to a “moral condemnation of war [that] has become so well-nigh universal and so intense that it has to be reckoned with as never before... We are moved as never before to reject war as a

means for achieving good ends.” As Dulles saw it, —if the United States there is a public sentiment which, if maintained, will be a fierce obstacle against any temptation to launch a so-called preventive war‘ or deliberately to prod or trick potential enemies into acts which could plausibly be made a pretext for war...[P]ublic opinion exercises a powerful and, we can believe, a conclusive restraint against any who might feel that the choices are all so bad that war may be relatively tolerable.”⁵²

It is impossible, outside the immediate experience of World War II, to understand why most Americans after the war saw the preventive attack option as aggression. But the rejection of preventive war was more than just a response to the abstract anti-war principles that emerged from World War I. It was more than just a reaction to the terrible aggregate costs of World War II. It took the concrete examples offered by Imperial Japan, more precisely, the attack on Pearl Harbor,⁵³ and the prosecution of Nazi officials for —crimes against peace” at Nuremberg,⁵⁴ to provide ready symbols of criminal aggression that were linked explicitly to preventive war. For his central role in leading Japan’s preventive war, despite his insistence that it was justifiable self-defense, Prime Minister Tojo was hung. These external symbols of what America *was not*, and that defined what America *would not do*, made preventive war taboo as a policy option.

In the coming years, despite the tremendous strategic pressure created by the projected threat of Soviet atomic weapons, American leaders could not betray the principles that had emerged from the tragic experience imposed on them by their recently defeated enemies. Most important, the vast majority of Americans at all levels of the political system refused to cast themselves into the moral pit defined by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan by succumbing to the preventive war temptation. Truman administration officials condemned preventive war as undemocratic and contrary to America’s character, as morally corrosive, a weapon of dictators that was simply unacceptable to the United States. In the Formosa Strait crisis, President Eisenhower declared unambiguously that the United States must accept the military liabilities of allowing China to strengthen its military capabilities, rather than assume the moral and political liabilities of initiating —aggressive” action against this adversary. President Johnson ruled out preventive attack against China’s emerging nuclear program in 1964, afraid of the political black mark this act would carry, both at home and abroad. In the wake of Israel’s 1981 attack on the Osirak nuclear facility in Iraq, the Reagan administration went so far as to co-sponsor with Iraq a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning its ally for violating international norms against aggression and for further destabilizing a dangerous region.⁵⁵

Despite this long-standing tradition of rejecting the preventive war option as unacceptable aggression, by the early 1990s America’s commitment to the anti-preventive war norm was loosening as new arguments emerged claiming that initiating preventive war against —rogue states” in pursuit of nuclear weapons should be considered a normatively permissible strategic option to uphold the global

interest in stopping nuclear proliferation. In the spring of 1994, at the height of the first North Korean nuclear crisis, the Clinton administration ultimately rejected preventive war because of its military risks. Yet in a dramatic departure from previous cases the preventive war option was evaluated without a hint of the normative stigma of aggression that it carried for Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and arguably Reagan.⁵⁶

Building on this emerging domestic acceptance of preventive war from the early 1990s, the George W. Bush administration formally articulated a new argument that preventive war must be considered a legitimate measure of collective self-defense, and put this conception of preventive war to work against Iraq in 2003.⁵⁷ It is important to note that the 2002 NSS explicitly acknowledges that the United States was pursuing a change in the normative boundaries traditionally placed around the notion of —~~n~~ anticipatory self-defense.” In broad terms, the document rightly notes, —For centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack.” But as the NSS admits, the standards that normatively and legally legitimized true preemption were high. The state had to face an actual —~~i~~nminent threat” most often demonstrated by —~~a~~ visible mobilization of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack.” According to the Bush administration, this standard was no longer valid in an age of rogue states and terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. As a result, the NSS asserts that “we” (presumably speaking of the United States *and* the international community) —~~m~~ust adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries.” No longer was it necessary, therefore, to have any certainty of the —~~i~~me and place of the enemy’s attack,⁵⁸ nor even if the enemy would ever attack at all,⁵⁹ to justify launching a war as genuine self-defense.

Here we come to the crux of one problem potentially created by an assertive American effort to alter the normative distinction between defensive preemption and aggressive preventive war. Will other states actually adopt this strategic logic and normative justifications for their own use? As Brooks and Wohlforth note, in a period of remarkably few external constraints on American actions in the international system, the United States is in a privileged position historically to use its —~~h~~egemony to reshape...standards of legitimacy” and —~~i~~nstitutionaliz[e] its preferred solutions to problems.”⁶⁰ While Brooks and Wohlforth are careful to note that they believe the Bush administration’s militarism was a misguided use of America’s unfettered power, their essential point remains that America is uniquely positioned to effect normative change on important international issues. The core question then arises, did America’s efforts to loosen the normative restrictions on preventive war have this impact at the international level, or with key states in the system? How do other states now understand the normative aspects of preventive war, following America’s political and military actions since 2002?

The dominant concern among those who have asked this question is that America's political efforts on behalf of a new standard for imminent threat and preemptive self-defense have increased the likelihood that other states would follow America's model. According to a prominent UN panel's report from 2004, ~~in~~ a world full of perceived potential threats, the risk to the global order and the norm of non-intervention on which it continues to be based is simply too great for the legality of unilateral preventive action, as distinct from collectively endorsed action, to be accepted. Allowing one to so act is to allow all.”⁶¹ This certainly was not the Bush administration's intent. The 2002 NSS states clearly that ~~the~~ United States will not use force in all cases to preempt emerging threats, *nor should nations use preemption as a pretext for aggression.*⁶² But America's refusal to ~~remain~~ idle while dangers gather⁶³ and its willingness to act unilaterally to deal with these perceived dangers might indeed serve as a model for other states that face the preventive war temptation to deal with their own security dilemmas. The most widely cited cases of states taking advantage of new self-defense standards to launch preventive war include India against Pakistan and China against Taiwan.⁶³

This brings us back to the core question in this paper: how have Chinese government officials and academics responded to the Bush administration's preemption strategy? Is there any evidence of increased receptiveness in China to the normative framework on preventive war established by the Bush administration? To help organize the empirical findings on these questions, we will first return briefly to the concept of strategic culture. Amitav Acharya, in useful work on how norms actually spread from one state or region to another, highlights the importance of existing ~~local~~ norms.” Simply put, the spread of new normative beliefs can depend on local agents who find value and opportunities in the new norms and then actively work to ~~build~~ congruence between transnational norms...and local beliefs and practices.”⁶⁴ How Chinese elites react to new claims on behalf of preemption may depend on preexisting strategic culture that shapes their broader orientation to the nature of the international system and the role of military force.

Chinese Strategic Culture and Preventive War

A prominent body of research explores the deep historical roots and contemporary impact of strategic culture on key elements of China's security policy. In fact, while there seems to be a widely shared consensus among students of Chinese history and foreign affairs that strategic culture is an essential variable shaping China's behavior, there is a robust ongoing debate over how Chinese elites actually tend to view ~~the~~ role of war in human affairs, the nature of the adversary, and the efficacy of military force.”⁶⁵ This dispute specifically revolves around whether Chinese strategic culture is more war-prone or temperate and defense-oriented. Given the tremendous potential for continued system-altering growth in its power in the coming decades, and the remaining uncertainty over how China will

actually use its growing capabilities, strategic culture might offer important clues for anticipating China's future behavior. For the purposes of this paper, Chinese reactions to the Bush administration's —preemption” doctrine, particularly the likelihood that China will either be receptive or resistant to the logic of preventive war, may be shaped by its preexisting strategic culture.

Scholars essentially advance three alternative views on China's strategic orientation toward the role of military force in state affairs. The first characterization, which can be considered the traditional view most widely shared by students of China, is that it has a *defense-oriented culture* that marginalizes the role of violence and war. Drawing primarily from the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and Sun Tzu, this cultural orientation emphasizes —a preference for peaceful strategies rather than aggressive ones,” the —reluctance to use force,”⁶⁶ a pessimistic view on —the ability to eliminate external threats with military means,”⁶⁷ and the belief that —to seek domination by force will simply turn the world against you.”⁶⁸

The second major characterization of Chinese strategic culture explicitly rejects the defensive view, proposing instead that the history of China and its great works of early military writing reflect an *offensive-oriented culture*. Alastair Iain Johnston, the most well-known advocate of this characterization, presents what he sees as a —hard realpolitik” view in Chinese traditions, which accepts —that warfare and conflict are relatively constant features of interstate affairs, that conflict with an enemy tends toward zero-sum stakes, and consequently that violence is a highly efficacious means for dealing with conflict.”⁶⁹ The final characterization found in the literature has been called the —cult of the defensive,” which can be considered a hybrid of the previous two cultural traditions. According to Andrew Scobell, —this cult predisposes Chinese leaders paradoxically to engage in offensive military operations as a primary alternative in pursuit of national goals, while rationalizing these actions as being purely defensive and a last resort.”⁷⁰

If strategic culture actually has the impact on Chinese behavior that these scholars assert, each alternative characterization has clear implications for the Chinese reaction to the concept of preventive war and the actions of the Bush administration since 2002. If contemporary Chinese strategic culture is best captured by the offensive view, then those in China who share this orientation would not only find preventive war unproblematic normatively, we should also expect a tendency to embrace preventive war as a smart strategic option to deal with the emerging power of potential adversaries. It is fair to predict from this perspective that offensively-oriented Chinese elites would not embrace an *American* assertion of the right to —preempt” emerging powers, particularly if asserted as a unilateral American right. In a zero-sum world in which offensive military action is considered an efficacious approach to national security, the Bush Doctrine would only serve to further cement American dominance of the international system and pose a threat to China. But the idea of preventive war itself should be seen as a legitimate and attractive strategic option that China would want to reserve for its own use if the right situation arose.

Similarly, while preventive war would seem perfectly acceptable strategically based on the offensive component of the “~~clt~~ of the defensive” orientation, according to this view Chinese leaders would feel compelled, just as the Bush administration did in the case of Iraq, to defend it as a necessary act of self-defense. Only if China’s strategic culture is dominated by the defensive orientation would we expect wholesale rejection of the Bush administration’s advocacy of a new international interpretation of the preventive war norm. We would expect this reaction not only to preventive war as a unilateral tool of American foreign policy, but opposition as well to preventive war/preemption as a general strategic option any state might adopt to deal with shifting power.

China’s Reaction to America’s Changing Strategic Culture on Preventive War

The evidence presented in this section comes from two types of sources, written and broadcast reports from Chinese media and personal interviews with Chinese academics and military officers in the city of Changsha. The media reports were collected from the Open Source Center (OSC), formerly known as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). OSC is a service provided by the office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, which conducts English language translations of foreign media sources from around the world. For this study all Chinese sources in the OSC database were searched, with the keywords “preemption” and “preventive war,” from July 2002 (immediately following President Bush’s West Point speech introducing the preemption policy) through December 2006 (the year the Bush administration reaffirmed the preemption doctrine in an updated National Security Strategy, the North Korean government conducted its first nuclear weapon test, and debate intensified over how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program). These parameters produced 26 separate sources from the OSC database, including news stories and analysis from Communist Party and Peoples Liberation Army newspapers, academic reports, television news broadcasts, and website postings.

Despite the diversity of the individual sources addressing this topic, they are remarkably consistent in how they characterize the concept of preventive war/preemption⁷¹ and Bush administration policy. The perspectives can be distilled into a few salient points:

- There is no evidence of any inclination to adopt the normative language or strategic rationale for preemption/preventive war offered by the United States.
- Preventive war is aggression/an offensive use of force.
- Preventive war is a tool for cementing American hegemony.
- Preventive war is a violation of the most important international norm – the sovereign right to non-interference.
- Japan is the country most likely to follow the U.S. preemption model.⁷²

The overwhelming consensus in these Chinese media sources, a position asserted repeatedly and emphatically, is that the Bush administration’s preemption policy is nothing more than a tool of American

hegemony. In fact, 91% of all sources in the OSC database that address the United States specifically (23 of 26 reports) make this claim. As noted earlier, the 2002 NSS and subsequent political efforts by the Bush administration to reshape the normative meaning of preventive war aimed to have this meaning accepted internationally as a new self-defense standard that not only served the interests of specific states, but that also served the broader security interests of the international community. Chinese commentators rejected this view outright.

The immediate reaction of China's official Xinhua news agency in September 2002 was to highlight a link between preemption, unilateralism, and America's commitment to maintaining its primacy in the international system. While the administration probably saw the role of preemption and primacy in the national security strategy as distinct components, each in fact is clearly articulated as American policy.⁷³ Given the historic role of preventive war as a mechanism to control the distribution of power, it should not be surprising that Chinese analysts would make this connection. According to the Xinhua report, this "aggressive strategy" of preemption —and the unhidden goal of maintaining U.S. military supremacy in the world [are] at the core of the first national security strategy adopted by the administration of George W. Bush." Preemption specifically, it contends, "contradicts the concept of self-defense defined by the United Nations Charter and would encourage other countries to take actions against their rivals without clear threat."⁷⁴

From this point forward, Chinese commentary sustains this explicit interpretation of preemption as an aggressive tool of American dominance in the international system. For example, an April 2005 article in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the daily newspaper of the General Political Department of the Peoples Liberation Army, declared that "the goals and principles" of the —U.S. military's traditional emphasis on maintaining an offensive posture" is to enable a —more expansionistic national security strategy and war-like actions of the United States." It asserts, "preemption is the embodiment of the superiority of U.S. military affairs over U.S. foreign policy." This leads to —unilateral military action [that] often creates problems with the world's security and increases uncertainty in international relations."⁷⁵ A Xinhua news agency review of the Bush administration's updated NSS in 2006 notes "the most eye-catching part of the report is none other than the affirmation and reiteration of the 'preemptive' military strike strategy." According to this analysis, the preemption strategy —is meant to safeguard the United States' strategic position and vested interests. The core of the U.S. security strategy has all along been to safeguard its superpower status and build an international system that conforms to that goal. In implementation, the strategy's concrete manifestations are maintenance of absolute military supremacy [and] promotion of U.S. values in the political arena."⁷⁶

A number of Chinese reports in the Open Source Center database examine other issues within the same framework linking the preemption strategy and American hegemony. A persistent theme is that

preventive war with Iraq, and the threatened preventive attack against Iran, would simply serve American interests in dominating Middle East oil at the expense of China.⁷⁷ The announcement in 2004 that America was going to realign its forces worldwide, which included reducing the number of U.S. forces in East Asia, was characterized by Chinese analysts as simply a means to facilitate preemption and hegemony. An article in *Zhongquo Qingnian Bao*, the daily newspaper of the Communist Youth League of the Communist Party Central Committee, warns that the —reduction in the number of U.S. forces overseas will not affect the U.S. capability to intervene in global conflict areas...U.S. troops stationed in Japan will play the vanguard role of the U.S. preemption strategy... Still not satisfied with the status quo,” the United States —hopes to further increase U.S. Forces projection capabilities” and —enhance its policy of international intervention.”⁷⁸ According to a PLA newspaper, base realignment will —enhance [America’s] ability to control the world” through its preemption strategy.⁷⁹ Other Chinese reports see the emphasis on preemption and unilateralism as a direct American attempt to block a —historic trend” toward multilateralism, to undermine the role of the UN as a body for collective decision making, and to prevent the emergence of a multipolar distribution of power.⁸⁰

Beyond this fixation on the link between preemption and American hegemony, these reports highlight another cause of Chinese sensitivity to America’s efforts to reshape the traditional normative restraints on preventive war. As Alastair Johnston points out, —China is one of the strongest defenders of a more traditional absolutist concept” of sovereignty. —Alongwith a large number of other developing countries, it is by and large fighting as a conservative power to reaffirm sovereignty and internal autonomy against challenges from evolving concepts of human rights, domestic governance, and humanitarian intervention.”⁸¹ As several Chinese reports in the Open Source Center database assert, a new right of preemption —has dealt a heavy blow to the principle of sovereignty.”⁸² This assertion points to an enduring conundrum in world politics. Each state can claim the inherent sovereign right to provide itself with sufficient military force for defensive purposes, yet this norm comes with the attendant obligation to tolerate other states arming themselves for their own defense.⁸³ According to the traditional conception of sovereignty, the mere fear of another’s military capabilities, the kind of fear that produces the classic security dilemma, does not confer the right to attack and destroy the other’s military forces. For the Chinese, as staunch defenders of this notion of sovereignty, preemption fundamentally undermines —the sovereign equality of all and freedom from the threat of war,” specifically unilateral war, defined by the UN Charter.⁸⁴

Interestingly, interviews and focus group discussions with Chinese academics and military officers in the city of Changsha produced identical perspectives on preemption and the Bush doctrine. As noted in the introduction, the data presented below was collected during personal discussions in November 2008 with 120 graduate students and 18 faculty members in the politics and international law

programs at Central South University (CSU), with a general officer in the PLA who is currently the director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the National University of Defense Technology, and several of his military faculty members. The focus of questions posed during these interviews and focus group discussions included: 1) whether America was seen as a leader or a model for the international community, and China specifically, of how to adapt to the contemporary threat environment; 2) are America's standards for legitimizing preventive war as self-defense acceptable to China; and 3) do Chinese see the normative standards for preemption advanced by the United States as useful for China's own security interests?

To a person, every individual interviewed rejected the notion that America served as an attractive model for adopting new rules on the use of military force and dealing with emerging threats. For the Chinese respondents it was impossible to reflect at great length on the normative legitimacy of preventive war as an abstract question, to discuss the meaning of self-defense versus aggression and how general norms of behavior should be defined for the international community. The concrete role of the United States as the messenger, and the spectacle of America's preventive war against Iraq, fully framed their perspective on these general issues. According to Professor Liang Shuquan, the director of CSU's Office of International Exchange and Cooperation, the Iraq war demonstrated two key points. First, the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, which American leaders insisted were being secretly developed or stockpiled by the Saddam Hussein regime, was a terrible blow to American prestige. It produced great distrust in China of America's intelligence capabilities, its assessments of actual threats in the international system, and in American judgments on when military force was appropriate to deal with contemporary threats. Second, Professor Liang emphasized that the continuing violence in Iraq, the regional instability created, the terrible costs of the war in Iraqi civilian casualties, and the great uncertainty over Iraq's political future, fundamentally undermine the claim that military force is an effective means to deal with international problems. Professor Liang argued that America did not have the ability to manage the many problems that the war produced, and given the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the invasion was for nothing. The consequence of the Bush administration's willingness to act on the principles in the preemption doctrine was to make America itself a danger to the rest of the world, rather than a source of security against real dangers. His colleagues agreed fervently with each point made, and in each graduate student focus group the same points were raised independently. Only two CSU graduate students out of the 120 interviewed supported the American invasion of Iraq. But as we saw in the previous data on Chinese attitudes reflected in the Open Source Center database (see footnote 84), they did so not because they thought Iraq posed a growing international threat that must be stanch, but because of the brutality of the Saddam Hussein regime.⁸⁵ When this pro-

war position was stated in separate focus groups it sparked an immediate, negative reaction from the other participants.

Echoing the dominant view in the Chinese media reports, the widely repeated belief at CSU was that the Bush administration's preemption doctrine was not meant to serve international security interests but to lock in American hegemony. These Chinese academics, and particularly the students, were highly sensitive to a perceived double-standard imposed by the United States. According to this view, the new standards proposed by the United States for legitimate preemption were meant for America's use, or for American-led interventions, only; other states were not permitted to adopt the new preemption norms to deal with their own security problems.

It is important to note that Chinese respondents did not interpret the Bush administration's efforts to gain acceptance for looser preemption standards to be an effort to reshape an *international* norm. Instead, it was seen as a unilateral declaration of America's right to take action, even if much of the rest of the world objected. This raises a serious question about the hegemon's ability to reshape international norms, as Brooks and Wohlforth suggest it can and should (see footnote 60). The hegemon might certainly be able to *act* without external constraints based simply on its overwhelming power; these Chinese respondents bluntly recognized the fact of American power and the unchecked capabilities it implies. But generating acceptance from other states that these acts are justified by new normative standards is a very different challenge. According to the consensus view among these academics at CSU and the military officers interviewed, America is not in a special position to rewrite the rules of the international system to legitimate its self-serving policies.⁸⁶ Some saw the emphasis on weapons of mass destruction in the Bush doctrine as an indication that America's specific intent was to use preemption to sustain American supremacy in nuclear weapons and lock in a permanently asymmetric power relationship with regional states that might pursue nuclear weapons of their own for deterrence purposes.

Not a single respondent in the interviews and focus groups supported the notion that looser preemption standards might serve China's security needs in the future. This conclusion was based on three general points raised by many respondents. First, preventive military action was not seen as an applicable strategic concept for the various security concerns on China's periphery.⁸⁷ Interestingly, when Taiwan was raised all respondents argued that this was an internal, domestic Chinese problem. Since the logic of preventive war applies to power shifts among independent states, preventive war or preemption was simply seen as irrelevant. Second, most linked preemption with America's experience in Iraq, which generated great skepticism over whether this policy option could actually achieve useful goals without producing a range of unforeseen, and unmanageable, problems that would negate any value preemption might hold. Many drew the conclusion that America is far too confident in the use of military force to deal with foreign problems. Finally, the strong consensus view shared by the PLA officers, the faculty

and the students, which was raised independently in each interview session and without prompting by the interviewer, was that preventive war violates China's cultural preference for creating the Confucian ideal of —harmonious society” and ensuring that its rise as a great power in accomplished peacefully.

Conclusion

In the decades following World War II, American fidelity to the anti-preventive war norm played an important role in sustaining international consensus on this point. In the wake of 9/11, American leadership sustained a political drive to gain support for the belief that new threats justified new normative standards of military action for —anticipatory self-defense.” It is clear from the evidence presented in this paper that, in the case of China at least, the Bush administration failed to —reshape” the norms and standards of legitimacy that for much of the 20th century distinguished defensive preemption from aggressive preventive war. This new normative claim met with a skeptical, even hostile, reception in China. In fact, Chinese media sources routinely assert that America simply exploited the 9/11 tragedy to justify a global strategy aimed at preserving its dominance in the system.⁸⁸

Beyond the empirical significance of these findings, it is also useful to explore possible explanations for why America failed in this effort to reshape the norms of self-defense. How behavioral norms emerge and how they change over time remain important theoretical and empirical questions in international relations. This research can make a contribution to this area of inquiry. The first variable that likely had an impact on China’s refusal to accept a new normative framework for legitimizing preventive war is *power*. Since China remains at a great structural disadvantage relative to the United States, it would likely reject any new idea that would relax the normative restraints on America’s use of military force. The new preemption norm is seen by the Chinese as a distinctly American doctrine legitimizing America’s quest to sustain its hegemony, not as a necessary adjustment serving the actual security challenges faced by the broader international community or particular regions. The source of this new normative claim and its implications for the systemic distribution of power, therefore, nullify its acceptability to this rising state.

The second variable with a likely impact on the Chinese reaction is a *preexisting strategic culture*. As noted earlier, scholars of Chinese history and politics have advanced three alternative strategic cultures said to impact how Chinese elites understand the nature of international politics, the nature of adversary states, and the role and efficacy of military force. The only version of Chinese strategic culture that was unreservedly supported by the evidence collected for this paper is the most long-standing among scholars: the Confucian-Mencian defensive view that marginalizes the role of violence in state affairs. Given the complete lack of an exhibited inclination to find ways, or to reserve the future right, to adapt the strategic logic or normative language of the Bush administration’s preemption doctrine

for Chinese purposes, it calls into question whether the offensively-oriented strategic cultures that Johnston and Scobell find in Chinese history are relevant to contemporary China. If Acharya is right, that international norms spread more easily if they are made congruent with existing local culture by domestic elites, then the profound normative gap between a defensive strategic culture and the offensive orientation of preventive war may help explain Chinese resistance. Whether or not Chinese elites actually share a Confucian-Mencian worldview, it is clear that no Chinese elites are actively working to convince their countrymen that preemption/preventive war is a legitimate and useful strategic principle that China must take seriously. As David Kang contends, “China’s concern for sovereignty” is a “central aspect of its identity.”⁸⁹ As long as a strong reflexive impulse to defend the sovereignty principle remains central to Chinese strategic culture, and preventive war is seen as an instrument of American hegemonic power, it is unlikely that Chinese elites will embrace, or even tolerate, the efforts of the United States to reshape the norms bounding preventive war.

Endnotes

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⁸ Thomas U. Berger, “Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan,” in *The Culture of National Security*, 326.

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¹¹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), chap. 9; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 131.

¹² Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 42-43; John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 4-8.

¹³ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 14.

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¹⁹ Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983); Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* 36 (July 1984): 496-526.

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²⁵ Ibid., 95.

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²⁷ Peter J. Katzenstein, "Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security," in *The Culture of National Security*, 5; Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security," in *ibid.*, 54; Jeffrey W. Legro, "Which Norms Matter? Revisiting the 'Failure' of Internationalism," *International Organization* 51, no. 1 (winter 1997): 33; Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 69-70.

²⁸ Nina Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use," *International Organization* 53, no. 3 (summer 1999): 433-68.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 23-26.

³¹ Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions*, 251-3; Michael Ross Fowler and Julie Marie Bunch, *Law, Power, and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

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39, no. 4 (December 1995): 696-717; Nina Tannenwald, "Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (spring 2005): 5-49.

³⁴ Ethan A. Nadelmann, "Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society," *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (autumn 1990): 479-526.

³⁵ Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), chap. 3.

³⁶ "U.S. Abuse of Iraqi Detainees at Abu Ghraib Prison," *The American Journal of International Law* 98, no. 3 (July 2004): 591-6; Mark Danner, "We Are All Torturers Now," *New York Times* (January 6, 2005), 27.

³⁷ Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security," 60-62.

³⁸ George F. Kennan, "On American Principles," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 1995): 120.

³⁹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security* (Spring 1995): 32-64.

⁴⁰ Berger, "Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan," 325-26.

⁴¹ Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo."

⁴² For a useful discussion of these issues see Karl P. Mueller, *et. al.*, *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in U.S. National Security Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), chapter 3. See also Scott A. Silverstone, "The Origins of New Security Constructions: Weapons Proliferation and the Preventive War Option," *Handbook of Defence Politics*, eds. Isaiah Wilson III and James Forest (London: Routledge Press, 2008), 31-39.

⁴³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* [1832], trans. J. J. Graham (London: N. Trubner, 1873), chap. 1.

⁴⁴ Yoram Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70, 72-73; James T. Shotwell, *War as an Instrument of National Policy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), 14-15.

⁴⁵ John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: the Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

⁴⁶ Peter Maguire, *Law and War: An American Story* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 79, 83; Telford Taylor, *Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 66-67.

⁴⁷ Sheldon Glueck, *The Nuremberg Trial and Aggressive War* (New York: Kraus Reprint Group, 1966), 29-32.

⁴⁸ For some classic examples see E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1940); Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*.

⁴⁹ Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

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⁵¹ Henry L. Stimson, "The Challenge to Americans," *Foreign Affairs* 26 (October 1947): 9.

⁵² John Foster Dulles, *War or Peace* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), 234-35, 262-64.

⁵³ Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 12, 14, 22-23.

⁵⁴ Robert H. Jackson, *The Nurnberg Case* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947); William J. Bosch, *Judgment on Nuremberg: American Attitudes Toward the Major German War-Crime Trials* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970).

⁵⁵ For the most detailed discussion of the idea of preventive war in American policy making from the 1940s to the present, see Silverstone, *Preventive War and American Democracy*.

⁵⁶ Ibid., chap. 6 and 7.

⁵⁷ NSS 2002, 15. Also The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (March 2006).

⁵⁸ NSS 2002, 15.

⁵⁹ Ronald Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

⁶⁰ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 208, 216.

⁶¹ —More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility,” a report of the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, (2004), 63. See also Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Gregory A. Raymond, —Global Terrorism and Military Preemption: Policy Problems and Normative Perils,” *International Politics* 41 (2004): 37-49.

⁶² NSS 2002, 15. Emphasis added.

⁶³ For example see Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond, —Preventive War and Permissive Normative Order,” *International Studies Perspectives* 4 (2003): 385-94; Kofi A. Annan, speech to the UN General Assembly, September 23, 2002; Jing-dong Yuan, —Chinese Perspectives and Responses to the Bush Doctrine,” in *Confronting the Bush Doctrine: Critical Views from the Asia-Pacific* ed. Mel Gurtov and Peter Van Ness (London: Routledge, 2005), 108, 117; Amitav Acharya, —The Bush Doctrine and Asian Regional Order,” in ibid., 215-216; John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 36; Miriam Sapiro, —Iraq: The Shifting Sands of Preemptive Self-Defense,” *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 3 (July 2003): 599. During the American congressional debate on the Iraq war resolution in October 2002, Senators Sarbanes, Levin, Conrad, and Biden worried about the international precedent of an American preventive war. See *Congressional Record* S10156, October 9, 2002; S10233, October 10, 2002; S10164, October 9, 2002.

⁶⁴ Amitav Acharya, —How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organization* (Spring 2004): 241.

⁶⁵ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22, 61.

⁶⁶ Hiuyen Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Confucianism, Leadership and War* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2, 25.

⁶⁷ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 64.

⁶⁸ Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, 21. See also Hsu Chuo-yun, —Applying Confucian Ethics to International Relations,” *Journal of Ethics and International Affairs* (March/April 1991): 15-31; Edward O’Dowd and Arthur Waldron, —Sun Tzu for Strategists,” *Comparative Strategy* 10, no. 1 (1991): 25-36. For an extensive list of sources advancing the defensive perspective on Chinese strategic culture see Feng, fn 5, pp. 141-142.

⁶⁹ Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 61. See also Johnston, —Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China.” Johnston’s characterization of Chinese strategic culture looks identical to the —offensive realist” orientation that Mearsheimer argues all great powers share because of the pressures and uncertainties of international anarchy. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

⁷⁰ Andrew Scobell, *China’s Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

⁷¹ While the terms —preventive war” and —preemption” are used interchangeably in this paper, the strategic logic and circumstances implied for each is that which defines *preventive war*. Since the Bush administration used the term —preemption” consistently, most commentators, American and international, adopted this language. This convention is reflected in the OSC translations of Chinese media reports.

⁷² For articles on the danger of Japan adopting the preemption strategy see Beijing CCTV-7 —Military Report” 1130 GMT 24 September 2006; Wang Honggang, a scholar at the American research center under the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, “ 'See Through [It]' and 'Let Go',” *Shanghai Dongfang Zaobao* (24 July 2006); Liang Ming, “Japan’s Self-Defense Forces ‘Waiting for the Moment to Strike’,” Beijing *Liaowang* (16 June 2003), pp. 30-31.

⁷³ On maintaining American military power beyond challenge see the 2002 NSS, 30.

⁷⁴ Tan Xinmu, "Bush Sets Fighting Terrorism As National Security Goal," *Xinhua* in English 0716 GMT 21 September 2002.

⁷⁵ Long Min and Zhu Hui, "A Paradox of Power and Self-evident Truth: An Analysis of the US Department of Defense's Newly Issued Strategy Reports," *Jiefangjun Bao* (06 April 2005), p. 9. See also Xie Ying, "Large-Scale Disarmament Disproves 'China Threat Theory,'" *Qingnian Cankao* (08 October 2005); Zhang Xinghui, "US Foreign Policy Trends Following 'Transfer of Power,'" *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (01 July 2004); Ruan Zongze, Deputy Director of the Institute of International Studies, "US Diplomacy: Another Year of Unrestrained Power -- US is Seizing a Golden Historical Opportunity and Using its Unmatched Power to Pursue the Establishment of a New American Empire," *Liaowang* (22 March 2004), pp. 27-30; Tao Wenzhao, vice president of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, "The United States in the Dilemma of Unilateralism," *Renmin Ribao* (11 September 2003), p. 13. See also Peter Van Ness, —Chna's Response to the Bush Doctrine," *World Policy Journal* (winter 2004/2005): 38-46; Peter Hays Gries, —Chinese Wary of American Ambitions," *Denver Post* (November 28, 2004).

⁷⁶ Yang Qingchuan, "Why Does the United States Insist on a 'Preemptive' Strategy?" *Xinhua Domestic Service* 0618 GMT 17 March 2006.

⁷⁷ For example see Liu Qiang, "US vs. Iran: 'Peaceful Evolution' or 'War for Regime Change'?" *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (26 November 2004). Liu Qiang is Professor at the People's Liberation Army's International Relations Academy, writing in the newspaper of the Communist Youth League of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee; Pei Yuanying, "The Buzz of Failure -- Washington's unilateral strategy is the main cause of the current increased bloodshed in Iraq," *Beijing Review*, 29 April 2004. *Beijing Review* is China's official weekly general affairs journal.

⁷⁸ Jia Gan, "A Gradual Change From 'World Police' To 'World Fire Brigade'," *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (18 August 2004).

⁷⁹ Wu Qingli and Xie Jingsheng, "Analysis of Global Force Readjustment by US Military," *Jiefangjun Bao* (01 September 2004), p. 12. See also Yu Yang and Qi Xiaodong, "Major Realignment of US Military Bases: Deployment Aimed at Launching 'Preemptive Strike'," *Zhongguo Guofang Bao* (19 April 2005), p. 2.

⁸⁰ Qiu Huafei, "The Development Trend in Sino-US Strategic Relations in the New Century," *Shanghai Shehui Kexue* (20 February 2006), pp. 18-26; Qiu Shi, "Development of Multipolarization of the World Despite Twists and Turns," *Beijing Qiushi* (16 January 2004); Wu Miaofa, "Restructuring the United Nations -- The world body needs urgent reform, against increasing unilateralism in Washington," *Beijing Review* (13 May 2004); Ren Yujun, "Clear Unilateralist Coloration; Minor Adjustments in Operational Methods," *Renmin Ribao* (23 December 2003), p. 7; Wang Yiwei of the American Research Center, Fudan University, "US Blueprint of Global Hegemony," *Guangzhou Nanfang Zhoumo* (17 July 2003); Wang Tian, "'War on Terror' and 'Anti-Americanism,'" *Renmin Ribao* (19 October 2006), p. 3; Gu Dexin, Director of the International Relations Studies Office, National Defense University, "The US-Iraq War and China's National Security," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (20 April 2003), pp. 20-22.

⁸¹ Alastair Iain Johnston, —Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security* (spring 2003): 14-15. See also Nadine Godehardt, —The Chinese Meaning of Just War and its Impact on the Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China," German Institute of Global and Area Studies Working Paper, September 2008, p. 30.

⁸² —Iraq War Has Profound Impact on World," *Beijing Xinhua* (24 April 2003).

⁸³ This right to arm for defense does not necessarily extend to all types of weapons for all states. International conventions on such devices as chemical and biological weapons and land mines were initiated to classify these specific technologies as illegitimate for defense. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) creates two categories of states, those that are recognized as nuclear weapons holding states and those that pledge to remain non-nuclear weapons states. The NPT prohibits the vast majority of states in the international system from obtaining nuclear weapons. Despite such limitations on certain military technologies, there has been no subsequent norm emerging to justify the use of force to prevent particular states from pursuing such capabilities.

⁸⁴ Zhou Yihuang, "The Spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Lives On Forever," *Jiefangjun Bao* (28 June 2004), p. 9. See also Qiao Xinsheng, professor at Zhongnan University of Finance, Economy, Political Science, and Law, "Six Paradoxes of the Iraq War," *Renmin Wang* (04 April 2003); Wu Miaofa, "Restructuring the

United Nations"; Pei Yuanying, "The Buzz of Failure"; Wang Yiwei, "US Blueprint of Global Hegemony"; Wang Tian, "'War on Terror' and 'Anti-Americanism'"; Gu Dexin, "The US-Iraq War and China's National Security." Also see the text of a letter delivered by a large group of Chinese scholars to the U.S. embassy in Beijing and posted on the Qinghua University website in February 2003, "Report on PRC Scholars' Opposing Views on US War Against Iraq." Interestingly, the only Chinese document in the OSC database that supported the American war in Iraq was an opposition response from two academics to this statement by a much larger group of Chinese scholars. However, these academics supported the war for purely humanitarian reasons, to end the brutality of the Saddam Hussein regime. This statement did not support the Bush administration's contention that Iraq posed an imminent threat to the U.S. or the international community that justified war based on preventive logic. See Yu Jie and Xu Jinru, "Statement by Chinese Intellectuals Supporting the US Government's Smashing of Saddam's Dictatorial Regime."

⁸⁵ According to Jin Zhong, the editor-in-chief of the prominent pro-democracy journal *Kaifang* ('Open') published in Hong Kong, this is a popular sentiment among those in the pro-democracy community in China. The Bush administration's emphasis on democratization produced a sense of fellowship with those most insistent on democracy for China. Jin Zhong also noted, however, that the political problems in Iraq after the invasion have been widely seen as a failure of the Bush Doctrine and a great disappointment to the pro-democracy Chinese. Interview with author, October 17, 2008.

⁸⁶ A common example raised by faculty and students alike to illustrate America's double-standard for rule-making was American acceptance of India's nuclear weapons. It was noted that while the United States used the principles and rules of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to coerce countries like Iraq, Iran and North Korea, America itself violated the rules of the treaty by supporting India's civilian nuclear program even though this is prohibited because India is not a signatory to the NPT.

⁸⁷ One useful report produced for the Office of the Secretary of Defense by the RAND Corporation concluded that Chinese military writers do find "preemption" to be a valuable strategic concept, particularly for weaker states in a conflict, and a legitimate form of "active defense." A careful reading of this analysis, however, shows that "preemption" here actually means "preemption" in the classic sense of a first strike conducted on the threshold of an actual conflict. James C. Mulvenon, et. al, *Chinese Responses to U.S. Military Transformation and Implications for the Department of Defense* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2006), 48-53. Alastair Johnston agrees, arguing that Chairman Mao "eschewed preventive war but not preemptive war." See "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," 250.

⁸⁸ For example see Qiu Shi, "Development of Multipolarization of the World Despite Twists and Turns"; Ruan Zongze, "US Diplomacy: Another Year of Unrestrained Power"; Wang Yiwei, "US Blueprint of Global Hegemony"; Wang Tian, "'War on Terror' and 'Anti-Americanism'."

⁸⁹ David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 102.